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Search for Bombers

THE STORY broke in February that Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley, utilizing information supplied by a one-time Ku Klux Klan informant, had reopened the investigation into the 1963 bombing of a Birmingham church in which four black girls were killed.

A few days later Baxley confirmed the report and added a blunt statement — that he knows who did the bombing; it was now simply a matter of obtaining the proof.

But that proof has been harder to come by than the Alabama authorities imagined, especially since the investigation went public. Officials are no longer expressing confidence that the case will be solved.

"There's a lot of difference between knowing who did something and proving it; we're just reaching stone walls all around," Assistant Attorney General James Sumner says. Public knowledge, he adds, is a hindrance. "It's just

after/words

so much easier to get people at the outer rim to speak when the principals don't realize something is going on. They tend to put pressure on those who know anything at all."

In addition, he says, the 13 years since the bombing have given people who might have come forward time to "ease their consciences. Time has allowed them to get it out of their system."